

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

DRAFT

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. **Place additional certification comments, entries, and narrative items on continuation sheets if needed (NPS Form 10-900a).**

1. Name of Property

historic name Selfridge & Langford Building
 other names/site number _____
 name of related multiple property listing N/A

Location

street & number 97-101 Central Avenue not for publication
 city or town Albany vicinity
 state New York code NY county Albany code 001 zip code 12206

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,
 I hereby certify that this X nomination ___ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.
 In my opinion, the property X meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:
 ___ national ___ statewide X local

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official Date

Title State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

___ entered in the National Register ___ determined eligible for the National Register
 ___ determined not eligible for the National Register ___ removed from the National Register
 ___ other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

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5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply.)

Category of Property
(Check only **one** box.)

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

- private
- public - Local
- public - State
- public - Federal

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1		buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
1	0	Total

Name of related multiple property listing
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)

COMMERCE/TRADE/specialty store

VACANT/NOT IN USE

COMMERCE/TRADE/warehouse

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions.)

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions.)

LATE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURY REVIVALS/

foundation: CONCRETE

Neoclassical Revival

walls: CONCRETE

roof: CONCRETE

other:

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Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance of the property. Explain contributing and noncontributing resources if necessary. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, setting, size, and significant features.)

Summary Paragraph

The Selfridge & Langford Building is located on its original footprint at 97-101 Central Avenue near the geographical center of the City of Albany, Albany County, New York. The building is nearly one mile northwest of the New York State Capitol, just over a mile from the banks of the Hudson River, and about one-quarter-mile northeast of Washington Park. Constructed in 1911, the building is a Neoclassical fireproof warehouse and showroom designed by Charles G. Ogden and constructed by the Turner Construction Company. While it was converted to office space in 1978, the fireproof construction and reinforced concrete frame of the building remain fully intact and legible. The exterior of the building also remains substantially intact.

Narrative Description

Location and Setting

The Selfridge & Langford Building occupies a lot near the center of a block of Central Avenue bound by Henry Johnson Boulevard to the south and Lexington Avenue to the north. Central Avenue serves as a major commercial thoroughfare in central Albany as well as a named portion of New York State Route 5, which extends from the state border with Pennsylvania to the southwest, passes through several major cities in the interior of the state, and terminates at the Hudson River in Albany. The parcel containing the building measures one-half acre in area and is roughly rectangular in shape, with a frontage of 130 feet along Central Avenue and a depth of 160 feet. A gated asphalt parking lot covers the northern half of the rectangular parcel, while the building itself occupies the southern half. Poured concrete walkways run the width of the building between the façade and Central Avenue as well as between the rear and Sherman Street. Two-to-four story commercial buildings from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries line the immediate blocks of Central Avenue to the north and south, while brick rowhouses from the same period line the blocks of the neighborhoods to the east and west.

Constructed in 1911, the Selfridge & Langford Building is rectangular in form and measures 130 feet in length and 70 feet in width. It is a four-story building of reinforced concrete construction with a flat gravel-covered concrete roof. The primary elevation of the building faces Central Avenue and has simple Neoclassical features, including concrete pilasters and a simple entablature, while the remaining elevations to the north and to the rear are austere and devoid of ornament. The building directly abuts a two-story brick commercial building to the south, and therefore only the third and fourth stories of the south elevation are visible. Due to a change in grade between Central Avenue and Sherman Street, a partially raised basement is visible on the north and rear elevations.

Exterior

The building is sited in the southern half of the parcel with its façade oriented to Central Avenue. The building's form is rectilinear in plan with a flat roof, and it sits on a concrete foundation. It is built of reinforced concrete with aluminum windows and modest concrete decorative elements like pilasters, paneled spandrels, and a simple entablature. The primary entryway is offset to the north on the primary façade, while secondary entrances, including a loading bay for autos, are located on the rear elevation. All doors are non-historic aluminum doors, and the doors of the main entryway are glazed. All windows have either been replaced with aluminum windows with fixed upper sections and functioning awning windows below or infilled with brick.

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Primary (west) façade: The primary facade of the building is three bays wide and clad in concrete from a mix of Portland cement and crushed granite. On the first floor, simple concrete piers separate the bays. From north to south, the primary entryway occupies the northernmost bay, which can be accessed by a concrete ramp with a steel handrail or a single concrete step. It features paired, glazed aluminum doors with a transom above. The center bay of the first story has modern quadripartite aluminum windows with aluminum panels in the lower register and three-quarter height glazing, and the southern bay has tripartite windows in the same configuration. Aluminum awnings hang above the glazed portion of each bay on the first story, and a simple aluminum stone cordon delineates the first story from the stories above. Squared concrete pilasters and concrete spandrels with recessed panels divide the three upper stories into bays, and each bay contains a modern quadripartite aluminum window with concrete sills. These windows have functional awning windows in the outer corners of the lower register, while the remaining lower portions and the three-quarter height portions above are fixed in place. A frieze with simple medallions above each pilaster and a simple cornice top the façade.

North elevation: A grid of concrete divides the north elevation into four stories with six bays. Due to a change in grade, the basement story is also partially visible to the east and is entirely composed of concrete. The four stories above are nearly identical, with five full bays of quadripartite windows to the east, two bays of brick to the west, and the third bay from the west containing half brick and half bipartite windows. The five bays to the east contain bricks in the lower quarter below non-historic quadripartite windows identical to those on the upper stories of the façade. These windows are largely fixed, with functional awning windows in the lower corners. The bipartite windows in the first bay from the west on each story resemble the eastern half of the windows in these other bays.

Rear (east) elevation: The rear elevation is two bays in width. Due to a change in grade between the façade and the rear, the basement story is fully exposed, and a portion of the subbasement is visible in the southern bay. The entire elevation is composed of structural concrete. Paired aluminum slab doors provide entry to the subbasement from the exposed portion of that level exposed to the south. The northernmost bay of the basement story contains a full-height aluminum overhead garage door as well as a pedestrian entry with a single aluminum door with a small, glazed window. The southernmost bay of the basement story contains paired window openings. The outer window opening in this bay contains fixed upper glazing and a lower awning window, while the inner window opening contains a louvered aluminum air conditioning exhaust in the upper section and a lower awning window. The second through fifth floors feature paired aluminum windows with fixed upper glazing and lower awning windows in the northern and southern bays. A concrete stairwell located on the roof continues above the center of the fourth story.

South elevation: The abutting two-story commercial building obscures the lowest two stories of the south elevation of the Selfridge & Langford Building. The upper stories are identical to the north elevation.

Interior

The interior of the building consists of a subbasement, a basement, a first floor with a lobby, and three upper floors with non-historic offices in various configurations. Despite the addition of removable partitions and dropped ceilings dividing the spaces into offices, the original organization of the interior of the building remains legible due to the presence of structural features, which can be clearly seen on several of the floors. Floors generally have a central corridor or passageway providing circulation from front to rear. Circulation is provided in the northwest corner in the front portion of the building and in the middle of the east wall at the rear of the building. Along with adjacent elevators, these circulation points provide access from the basement to the fourth floor. The front stairwell features steel handrails with squared steel newel posts, as well as concrete treads and risers. Secondary entries on the rear provide access to the subbasement in the southeast corner and the basement in the northeast corner. A rear elevator and a rear stairwell providing circulation to all floors occupy the center of the plan in the rear, and restrooms are arranged directly to the west of the rear elevator. This rear stairwell,

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which has steel treads, risers, and handrails, as well as linoleum tile landings, also provides access to the roof through the penthouse enclosure. Elevators have simple steel gates.

The subbasement is only partially excavated and extends across the east half of the building plan above. The subbasement is divided into one large room to the west and smaller rooms to the east, clustered around the rear stairwell. These rooms have concrete floors and reinforced concrete ceilings with exposed utilities and drywall partitions. Painted octagonal reinforced concrete columns also stand in locations that correspond to those on the floors above.

Despite non-historic subdivisions and finishes on the upper floors, structural components and original spatial divisions can clearly be seen. Two rows of seven painted octagonal reinforced concrete columns run the length of the basement and the first three floors, while squared reinforced concrete pillars in the same configuration are found on the fourth floor. Seven concrete columns are engaged in the north and south wall on each floor. Floors are finished with a mix of linoleum tile and carpet. All spaces have concrete exterior walls, drywall partition walls with linoleum baseboards, and dropped acoustic panel ceilings with fluorescent trough light fixtures. The dropped ceilings conceal utilities and insulation above, and lightwells extend to the height of the original ceiling around window openings in most cases. All doors are modern aluminum doors with simple wood surrounds.

The basement is primarily divided between four large rooms, with smaller restrooms and utilities arranged to the west of the rear stair and elevator. A double-loaded L-shaped corridor connects the front and rear stairwells and provides circulation between the rooms. One large L-shaped room spans the width of the west wall and two-thirds the length of the south wall, and the room along the north wall stretches from the elevator bay to this same position along the north wall. A small electrical closet, accessed from the main corridor, occupies the southeast corner of the latter room. The remaining rear quadrants hold rooms of similar size. A small utility room occupies the northeast corner of the room in the southeast quadrant of the plan. These three rooms have linoleum tile floors. The room in the northeast quadrant, which can be accessed from the garage door on the rear elevation, functions as a loading room with concrete floors and unfinished walls and ceilings. A half-level change in grade passable by a set of concrete steps with a steel handrail runs the length of the wall opposite the garage door.

The main entryway on the façade leads to the lobby on the first floor, which is connected to the rear stairwell by a double loaded L-shaped corridor. Small office partitions and bathrooms are arranged directly along the north of this corridor, while a single large room stretches the length of the corridor beyond these partitions to the north. A large, L-shaped room occupies the width of the west wall to the south of the lobby and much of the length of the south wall beyond the central corridor, while a smaller room occupies the southeast corner of the plan. The lobby has carpeted floors and a fixed laminate reception desk, while the remaining spaces have finishes standard to the building.

Small drywall office enclosures line most of the perimeter of the second floor, which has bathrooms enclosures arrayed along its lengthwise axis from the rear elevator and stair to another office in center of the plan, forming in turn the boundaries of a large room in the northeast corner of the plan. The western half of the plan is largely open aside from the perimeter offices along the west wall. A larger office in the center of the south wall has a wood chair rail, while all offices and rooms on the second floor have standard finishes.

The third floor has an irregular plan, with offices enclosures in the northwest, northeast, and southwest corners of the perimeter, and a cluster of office enclosures in the center of the southwest quadrant of the plan. Aside from a group of offices near the front elevator and the bathrooms in the standard configuration, the remainder of the floor is open in plan. An office in the southwest quadrant has a wood chair rail, while all offices and rooms on the third floor have standard finishes.

A curved L-shaped central corridor between the front stairwell and the rear stairwell provides circulation within much of the fourth floor of the building, while a secondary corridor double-loaded with small offices spans

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most of the length of the northern half of the floor. Executive suites occupy the western third of the plan, while the southern portion of the plan contains a series of small perimeter office partitions. Rather than a full enclosure, the length of the central corridor between the curved angle and the rear stairwell has a half-height gypsum wall. A large conference room occupies the northeast corner of the plan. Aside from a vinyl vertical board wall in an office along the north wall and a wood chair rail in the conference room, all offices and rooms on the fourth floor have standard finishes.

The Selfridge & Langford Building maintains good integrity in both form and materials. The building retains its original location, in a commercial setting along Central Avenue with the feeling of an early twentieth century commercial area. The building also retains structural integrity and remains otherwise in good physical condition. The exterior remains largely intact as it relates to its original design as a Neoclassical commercial building, retaining its original three-bay façade configuration and many original details, such as its concrete pilasters, spandrels, frieze, and cornice. The interior features its original fireproof construction, with its intact reinforced concrete frame visible throughout, and the open plans of its floorplates remain legible despite the addition of removable partitions and dropped ceilings. With the exception of limited changes such as window replacement and removable partitions and doors, the building retains the majority of its original features and finishes. Overall, the building retains many elements associated with early twentieth century reinforced concrete architecture.

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance

1911-1978

Significant Dates

1911

1958

1978

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years.

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

Charles G. Ogden (1911)

Turner Construction Company (1911)

Period of Significance (justification)

The period of significance for the Selfridge & Langford Building is 1911 to 1978, beginning with the construction of the building, encompassing its use as a furniture showroom and a warehouse, and ending with its conversion for use as office space by the State of New York.

Criteria Considerations (explanation, if necessary)

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Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph

(Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance and applicable criteria.)

The Selfridge & Langford Building is locally significant under criterion C in the area of architecture as a rare, substantially intact, and early example of beam and girder, reinforced concrete construction in the city of Albany. The beam and girder system of skeletal reinforced concrete construction was developed by Ernest L. Ransome at the end of the nineteenth century and further refined in the early twentieth century by entrepreneurial designers including the Kahn brothers (architect Albert Kahn and engineer Julius) and the Turner Construction Company, builders of the Selfridge & Langford Building. Reinforced concrete buildings offered numerous advantages that led to their rapid adoption, and the construction technique played a profound role in the evolution of the built environment throughout the twentieth century.

Turner Construction, which acquired one of Ransome's patents in 1902, built hundreds of warehouses, factories, and commercial buildings with reinforced concrete skeletons over the next few decades, revolutionizing the industrial landscape of American cities. Starting with a few commissions in Brooklyn in 1904, it expanded rapidly throughout the Northeast to become an internationally prominent firm. The Selfridge and Langford Building, constructed in 1911, was among the first group of buildings the Turners built outside of Brooklyn. It is one of only seven reinforced concrete buildings in the city of Albany. Of them, it is the second oldest and possibly the only one built by Turner Construction. Its beam and girder form, standard for warehouse construction in this period, produced a modular and adaptable floorplan characterized by wide central aisles and rows of octagonal columns. Specifications noted that temporary wooden partitions could be erected between the columns to create defined spaces for storage of household goods. This efficient plan was widely used for everything from single warehouse buildings to enormous warehouse complexes, such as Bush Terminal in Brooklyn.

The Selfridge and Langford Building is especially distinguished because it was built as a furniture sales and household goods business and was specifically designed to convey the appearance of fireproof construction, while also being stylish and appealing to the customer. It is one of only two buildings in Albany to combine these goals. The building was originally occupied by the firm of John Selfridge and Edward Langford, whose furniture sales and storage business expanded rapidly in the first decades of the century, triggering the need for a larger building in a more prominent location. The new building was located on Central Avenue, then experiencing a period of commercial growth in Albany; the development of commercial activity along Central Avenue spurred entrepreneurs to construct modern buildings to accommodate their businesses. To design a building that would meet this need, the owners turned to prominent Albany architect Charles E. Ogden, who is known for his many elegant residential and institutional buildings. However, Ogden had also designed Albany's earliest reinforced concrete building, the American Meter Company, in 1906. American Meter was a simple daylight factory in the industrial district. Its design conveyed only its method of construction, but its proportions, form and materials somewhat resembled Selfridge and Langford's. Comparing the two, Selfridge and Langford, with its fully developed Neoclassical façade, shows Ogden's success in fulfilling the mandate that the warehouse convey both strength and style. An article in *Cement Magazine* concurs with this assessment, noting:

The need, in a community the size of Albany, of some safe and adequate facilities for the storage of household goods is obvious. Up to the time of the erection of this building there was no fireproof building used for such a purpose: though most of the leading furniture dealers maintained storage rooms of some sort. The site of the new Selfridge & Langford building is well chosen for such a building. It fronts on the busy side of Central Ave. and extends through to Sherman St. which is an additional advantage as it will allow the handling of business without

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any confusion between the receiving of storage and the entrance of retail customers. Inasmuch as this was to be the first concrete building to be used by any of the retail establishments in Albany, it was felt that it should not only be fireproof throughout, but that it should be designed that it must at once impress the casual observer as being fireproof. But, at the same time, it was necessary to produce a building graceful and ornamentally distinctive to a degree that would attract the retail trade.

That an attractive front is a great help in drawing the retail trade has long been an accepted fact among merchants conducting retail businesses. For a long time the manner of treating the front of this building was a matter of indecision on the part of the owners. Concrete construction was something wholly new to most of the inhabitants of Albany, and it was thought that a brick front would appeal to them more readily than one of concrete. The owners decided, however, that the impression of absolute fireproofness [sic] given by a concrete front would more than counterbalance any momentary prejudice against a new form of construction.... The design is such as to give an appearance of extreme solidity. Enough ornamental detail has been added to soften the rather severe lines of concrete.

Taking this building as a retail store the design is most satisfactory. It brings out the material displayed for sale rather than the showroom itself, and it has a front that is both attractive and novel; though in bringing about this result none of the appearance of extreme strength and stability is lost.¹

While Selfridge & Langford ended the sales portion of their business in 1918, the building continued to function as a storage facility well into the second half of the twentieth century. The building retains sufficient integrity to illustrate its significance, in particular, the distinguishing features of its Neoclassical façade, including decorative pilasters with Doric capitals, recessed panels under the windows and a projecting cornice. This is among the most important aspects in conveying significance, as the strength of the concrete is clear and the intent of creating an obviously fireproof but visually appealing edifice is readily apparent. Although the original tripartite window groupings have been replaced by a type with four windows per opening, the original openings survive, and the alterations to the windows are reversible. The original storefront, two simple entrances and three windows, has been lost, but the defining piers, which are part of the structural system, remain. The building also retains all of the characteristics of reinforced concrete beam and girder construction, including, on the exterior, its structural piers and large window openings; on the interior, all of the octagonal structural columns (a hallmark of Turner Construction) survive and are visible. The original rear stair survives and is in its original location and the loading dock is also in the original location (the dock itself is either original or replaced in kind). The original concrete ceiling is covered by easily removable drop ceiling panels. On some floors, the three-part division into a central aisle and two flanking aisles (each of which could be divided horizontally) is evident and on others temporary office partitions have obscured it. However, the defining beam and girder structural system does survive and could be easily restored.

The period of significance for the Selfridge & Langford Building is 1911, beginning and ending with the construction of the building, encompassing its design for use as a furniture showroom and a warehouse.

¹ W. H. Nye, "An Up-to-Date Retail Store," *Cement*, 12, no. 4 (August, 1911): 91.

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Narrative Statement of Significance

Commercial Development along Central Avenue in Albany, New York

The development of Central Avenue as one of the preeminent business districts in Albany began at the turn of the nineteenth century, with the construction of the first turnpike in New York State. During the first century of its occupation, Dutch settlers in Albany referred to the area of Central Avenue as the Bowery in reference to its agricultural character, and the area retained the name well after the Dutch lost possession of New York State. In 1797, the Albany & Schenectady Turnpike Company commenced construction of a toll road connecting Albany and Schenectady, which began in the former at what is now the intersection between Washington Avenue and Henry Johnson Boulevard. This toll road provided the main route in and out of the city to the west during the early nineteenth century, and as a result of its importance, the orientation of the street grid in the surrounding area soon diverged from the standard plan of the rest of the city to the east in order to align with the angle of the street. Within a few years of its completion, inns, taverns, and warehouses lined the thoroughfare, then called Bowery Street.²

Although Bowery Street had already developed a well-established commercial character by the 1820s, the completion of the Erie Canal in 1825 drew traffic away from the turnpike, causing business to slow during months in which the canal remained unfrozen. The construction of the Mohawk and Hudson Railroad, which was finished in 1831, reduced further the traffic along the turnpike, and commercial activity on Bowery Street decreased during the subsequent decades.³

Changes that occurred during the 1860s restored commercial prosperity in the area. During that period, large numbers of German and Irish immigrants settled in the neighborhoods of the Bowery. The establishment of a horsecar system in 1863 connected Bowery Street to State Street and Broadway, easing the burden of transportation between the neighborhood and downtown Albany. The city graded and paved Bowery Street in 1865, and, two years later, the Common Council of Albany changed its name to Central Avenue. The avenue emerged as the center of commercial activity in the west of Albany, and the residents of the surrounding neighborhoods were equally drawn to the many saloons and restaurants as well as the retail businesses and storefronts.⁴

Prior to the turn of the twentieth century, the blocks of Central Avenue immediately adjacent to the Selfridge & Langford Building hosted a mix of residential buildings and small storefronts with businesses catering mainly to their immediate neighbors. During the later decades of the nineteenth century, the street supported a series of mixed-use buildings, typically with storefronts on the first story and residential space above. The replacement of the horsecar with an electric streetcar occurred in 1888, providing a more convenient means of traveling the blocks of the street and beyond.⁵

As the early twentieth century progressed, the scale of the commerce taking place along Central Avenue grew and so too did the number of purpose-built commercial buildings. In the 1910s, a series of automobile garages and retailers appeared along Central Avenue, which became the most prominent district for the sale and repair of automobiles. Meanwhile, retail businesses like Selfridge & Langford began to construct larger commercial

² Christopher D. Brazee, "Washington Avenue Corridor Historic District," National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, 2018, Section 8, Pages 61-62; William Kennedy, *O Albany* (New York: Penguin Books, 1983), 142-143.

³ Brazee, "Washington Avenue Corridor Historic District," Section 8, Pages 66-68; Kennedy, *O Albany*, 143.

⁴ Kennedy, *O Albany*, 142-145.

⁵ Brazee, "Washington Avenue Corridor Historic District," Section 8, Page 65; Kennedy, *O Albany*, 142-145.

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blocks and increase the scale of their operations to attract a larger clientele. By the middle of the century, Central Avenue was regarded as one of the most prominent shopping districts in Albany.⁶

Selfridge & Langford Building

John Selfridge, a native of Argyle, New York, and Edward Langford, an immigrant from Manchester, England, formed their business in the context of these developments. The partners met while working at Helmes Brothers, another furniture concern at 4 Central Avenue (1872, NR 2020), where they identified the need for more storage capacity in the area. The two entrepreneurs formed a partnership in 1900 and began selling furniture on their own, with the intention of constructing a large building for storage. Selfridge & Langford first sold furniture from the storefront of George Kreuger, a cabinet maker, at 83 Central Avenue (extant). After operating out of that location for seven years, the partners constructed a building at 72-74 Central Avenue (non-extant), but within a few years, the size of that building proved insufficient for their growing business.⁷

In 1911, Selfridge & Langford purchased and demolished a malt house at 97 Central Avenue in order to accommodate the construction of a modern building with a greater capacity for storage. The company selected noted local architect Charles G. Ogden to design a fireproof four-story showroom and warehouse with a reinforced concrete frame. Ogden had earned a reputation for his ability to incorporate modern building techniques in his works. The company worked with Ogden to select this method for its balance of affordability and utility, as well as its capacity to withstand the outbreak of fire.⁸ Ogden's design was the first of its kind for a retail building in Albany, and its construction earned substantial praise in an issue of *Cement*, a trade publication devoted to the use of cement and concrete, that appeared in August 1911:

The need, in a community the size of Albany, of some safe and adequate facilities for the storage of household goods is obvious. Up to the time of the erection of this building there was no fireproof building used for such a purpose: though most of the leading furniture dealers maintained storage rooms of some sort. The site of the new Selfridge & Langford building is well chosen for such a building. It fronts on the busy side of Central Ave. and extends through to Sherman St. which is an additional advantage as it will allow the handling of business without any confusion between the receiving of storage and the entrance of retail customers. Inasmuch as this was to be the first concrete building to be used by any of the retail establishments in Albany, it was felt that it should not only be fireproof throughout, but that it should be designed that it must at once impress the casual observer as being fireproof. But, at the same time, it was necessary to produce a building graceful and ornamentally distinctive to a degree that would attract the retail trade.⁹

In order to introduce the people of Albany to the possibility of a commercial building composed of structural reinforced concrete, Ogden attempted to strike a balance between the embodied expectations for an inviting place of business and the impression given by the comprehensive application of such a modern material. The use of reinforced concrete allowed for the incorporation of large window openings while maintaining a high

⁶ William W. Skirving and Julius J. Heller, "Avenue's History Traces Half-Century of Business Progress," *Knickerbocker News*, 1951; Kennedy, *O Albany*, 145.

⁷ C. L. Sweet and R. Nicholson, "97-99 Central Avenue," Building Structure Inventory Form, Historic Resource Commission, City of Albany Planning Office, Albany, 1988; Skirving and Heller, "Avenue's History Traces Half-Century of Business Progress," *Knickerbocker News*, 1951.

⁸ "Permits," *Albany Evening Journal*, March 11, 1911; Charles G. Ogden, Architect, 61 State Street," *Knickerbocker News*, Sept. 8, 1912.

⁹ W. H. Nye, "An Up-to-Date Retail Store," 91.

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degree of structural integrity and the appearance of durability. Meanwhile, the Neoclassical decorative elements included in the design of the façade, including the pilasters and the simple entablature, created an inviting appearance in accordance with the streetscape of Central Avenue. The same article in *Cement* makes the dual priorities of the business owners apparent:

That an attractive front is a great help in drawing the retail trade has long been an accepted fact among merchants conducting retail businesses. For a long time the manner of treating the front of this building was a matter of indecision on the part of the owners. Concrete construction was something wholly new to most of the inhabitants of Albany, and it was thought that a brick front would appeal to them more readily than one of concrete. The owners decided, however, that the impression of absolute fireproofness [sic] given by a concrete front would more than counterbalance any momentary prejudice against a new form of construction.... The design is such as to give an appearance of extreme solidity. Enough ornamental detail has been added to soften the rather severe lines of concrete.¹⁰

The same article concludes with the following:

Taking this building as a retail store the design is most satisfactory. It brings out the material displayed for sale rather than the showroom itself, and it has a front that is both attractive and novel; though in bringing about this result none of the appearance of extreme strength and stability is lost.¹¹

Upon its completion in 1911, Selfridge & Langford conducted a furniture sales and household goods storage business in the building. As was typical of reinforced concrete warehouses, the floor plan of the Selfridge & Langford Building was designed to be modular and able to adapt to changing business needs. The first floor contained a show room for the company's wares that apparently consisted mostly of open space: "The arrangement of the interior columns... was made for the purpose of allowing a customer as he enters an unobstructed passageway and a view of the stock unbroken in uniform divisions by the columns."¹² The upper floors were devoted to warehouse purposes and were initially unfinished except for a four-foot-wide, granolithic aisle running down the middle of each of the three length-wise bays. Customers looking to store their household goods were able to customize the space to their liking, and "On either side of these aisles individual storage rooms will be built from time to time as the demand for storage space requires."¹³

Interior finishes were likewise purposefully utilitarian and adaptable to changing business needs. As one account noted, "As it was wished to keep intact the appearance of thorough fireproofness there is no interior wood trim. The walls in the first story are plastered with cement mortar and all concrete work was carefully pointed by masons. After this work was finished two coats of dead white cold water paint were applied to all columns, walls, and ceilings."¹⁴ The most visually prominent interior feature was the regular grid of concrete columns and girders revealing the beam-and-girder construction of the building. The octagonal columns—used on all but the top floor—were a hallmark of the Turner Construction Company during this period; those of the

¹⁰ W. H. Nye, "An Up-to-Date Retail Store," 94-96.

¹¹ W. H. Nye, "An Up-to-Date Retail Store," 96-97.

¹² W. H. Nye, "An Up-to-Date Retail Store," 96.

¹³ W. H. Nye, "An Up-to-Date Retail Store," 94.

¹⁴ W. H. Nye, "An Up-to-Date Retail Store," 96.

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Selfridge & Langdon Building are very similar to one of the company's earliest and most recognized buildings, the Bush Model Factory No. 2 (1906) in Brooklyn, New York.¹⁵

Another notable feature in the largely unfinished interior space was the circulation core at the rear of the building. The topography of the site, which slopes down from Central Avenue, allowed at-grade access to the basement on Sherman Street. There, a large vehicular entrance opened to an internal loading bay communicating directly with a utility staircase and a freight elevator, allowing the easy transfer of large items in and out of the building under cover from the weather.¹⁶

Selfridge & Langdon continued to sell furniture until 1918. Advertisements from this period show the business holding sales of oak furnishings like dining room sets, buffets, and china closets. Toward the end of that year, the company disposed of its remaining stock of furniture designated for sale and hired Ogden & Gander to redesign the first floor for use as an office. After the renovation, the partners continued to operate the storage business in the building. The company often held sales to liquidate inventory belonging to deceased or defaulted customers during this period.¹⁷

In 1933, Langford purchased the full ownership of the concern from Selfridge, who died later that same year. Langford continued to operate the business for over two decades, finally selling the building to Standard Furniture in 1958. Langford himself died the following year, and Standard Furniture retained the name Selfridge & Langford for their operations at the building for the following two decades.¹⁸

Standard Furniture operated several furniture businesses in the Capital Region at the time of its purchase of the Selfridge & Langford Building. Abraham I. Fienberg founded the business in Albany in 1901, just a year after the opening of Selfridge & Langford and continued to expand the business in the decades to come. By 1951, the business operated in five locations, including Albany, Kingston, and Troy, and their success allowed them to purchase the Selfridge & Langford Building and its storage business upon Langford's retirement. After purchasing the building, Standard Furniture restored the sales portion of the business, and opened a showroom on the first floor.

In 1961, Standard Furniture leased two floors of the building to Albany State College (now University at Albany, State University New York) for use as Science and Biology classrooms, while keeping the remainder of the building in use as a furniture warehouse. A floor plan of the new educational facilities shows the adaptability of the modular, open-plan interior of the Selfridge & Langford Building. Working within the grid of columns and bays, the college was able to create space across the two floors for at least six laboratories, three classrooms, fifteen offices, a student lounge, and even a darkroom.¹⁹ Standard Furniture operated the sales and

¹⁵ The building was erected for the Bush Terminal Company, which eventually built an entire industrial park on the site. For a detail of typical octagonal columns, see *Sweet's Catalogue of Building Construction for the Year 1913*, (New York: The Architectural Record Co., 1913), 309.

¹⁶ "New Enterprises," *Bulletins of the American Warehousemen's Association*, 12, no. 131-142 (1911): 49-50.

¹⁷ "Advertisement," *Knickerbocker News*, Oct. 22, 1913; "Legal Notice," *Albany Argus*, Sept. 6, 1916; "End of War Brightens Real Estate Outlook," *Albany Evening Journal*, Nov. 16, 1918; "Legal Notice," *Albany Argus*, April 6, 1918.

¹⁸ "Albany Man Dies While at Dinner," *Knickerbocker News*, March 15, 1933; "Standard Furniture Buys on Central Ave.," *Albany Times-Union*, May 4, 1958; "E. Langford Dies at 84; Formed Firm," *Albany Times-Union*, Jan. 13, 1959.

¹⁹ "Science and Biology Classes Move to Building on Central," *State College News*, May 19, 1961, 1.

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storage business at the Selfridge & Langford Building until 1978, when it sold the location to the State of New York.²⁰

Reinforced Concrete Construction

The advent of the methods used for the construction of the Selfridge & Langford Building relied on a series of technological breakthroughs and architectural accomplishments that began to occur during the second half of the nineteenth century. In the 1870s, Thaddeus Hyatt, an American engineer and inventor living in England, sought a method for making floors with a greater capacity for withstanding the outbreak of fire. Drawing inspiration from two French floor systems using cementitious material and wrought iron, Hyatt designed, patented, and publicized a concrete tile construction method using an iron grid bonded with Portland cement. These tiles, designed for use as flooring and sidewalk panels, could be mass produced at a low cost, and Hyatt published a pamphlet that circulated widely in the United States.²¹

While Hyatt's innovative reinforced concrete panels initially received scant attention in England, the circulation of Hyatt's pamphlet in the United States propelled the adoption of the technology he patented. Engineers and architects in the United States had employed concrete as a building material at least as early as the construction of the Erie Canal, when builders made use of locally sourced hydraulic cement for the construction of locks and canal beds. In the second half of the nineteenth century, innovators experimented with the use of reinforced concrete in idiosyncratic projects like William E. Ward's home in Port Chester (1873-76, NR 1976), an eclectic Second Empire and Gothic Revival house composed entirely of reinforced concrete, but use of the material remained constrained by the absence of techniques for its mass manufacture. Hyatt's patented method provided a solution for this problem, and its adoption by Peter H. Jackson for use in the construction of sidewalks in San Francisco launched a movement that resulted in the incorporation of reinforced concrete in every kind of construction project.²²

In the 1880s, Jackson's company, P. H. Jackson & Co., sold the panels of Hyatt's patent and inspired architect George W. Percy to seek a way of incorporating reinforced concrete into his building projects. Percy worked alongside Ernest L. Ransome, who patented a method of reinforcing concrete with twisted iron bars in place of Hyatt's more expensive grid system and found innovative ways of using the material in his building projects. In the early 1890s, Percy and Ransome worked with the Stanford family on the construction of two buildings composed entirely of reinforced concrete, namely the Leland Stanford Jr. Museum (1891, extant) and Roble Hall (1891, demolished 1996) on the Stanford University Campus. While the outbreak of a devastating earthquake and fire in the Bay Area in 1906 left much of San Francisco and Palo Alto in ruins, these two buildings and others constructed of reinforced concrete withstood the disaster remarkably well, increasing the technology's reputation for durability.²³

Ransome dedicated the remaining decades of his career to the development and promotion of reinforced concrete. Toward the end of the decade, Ransome began working for the Pacific Coast Borax Company, for which he engineered a reinforced concrete floor to be installed in its works in Alameda, California (1898, not

²⁰ "Standard Recalls Small Beginnings," *Knickerbocker News*, June 4, 1951; "Standard Furniture Buys on Central Ave.," *Albany Times-Union*, May 4, 1958; "Science and Biology Classes Move to Building on Central," *State College News*, May 19, 1961; Sweet and Nicholson, "97-99 Central Avenue," Building Structure Inventory Form.

²¹ Sara E. Wermiel, "California Concrete, 1876-1906: Jackson, Percy, and the Beginnings of Reinforced Concrete Construction in the United States," *Proceedings of the Third International Congress on Construction History*, May 2009, 1-2.

²² Wermiel, "California Concrete, 1876-1906," 2-4; Jennifer Walkowski, "Huyler Building," National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, 2011, Section 8, Pages 2-3.

²³ Wermiel, "California Concrete, 1876-1906," 4-7.

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extant). Around this time, Ransome incorporated steel in place of iron as a reinforcing mechanism. Ransome also began working on the East Coast at the behest of the company, constructing a refinery in Bayonne, New Jersey, in 1897. While his design for the original refinery employed a self-supporting reinforced concrete block system in imitation of masonry construction, Ransome pioneered the use of reinforced concrete as a skeletal system for the construction of a subsequent addition, which provided extra strength for large window bays and greater fire resistance. Recognizing the superiority of this system, Ransome patented the design method.²⁴

Other engineers and inventors also contributed to the development of reinforced concrete buildings. As one historian notes, “the development of concrete reflected a long history of technical experimentation and, at the end of the nineteenth century, a remarkable burst of entrepreneurial enthusiasm that brought it into wide use among American buildings.”²⁵ A key part of this entrepreneurial enthusiasm involved the development of a wide variety of competing proprietary “systems,” each typically licensed under one or more patents. Though distinct enough to be awarded their own patents, most of these systems can be classified into two major groups: beam-and-girder construction and flat-slab construction.²⁶

Beam-and-girder construction was the first to be perfected and was championed by Ransome and his protégées at the Turner Construction Company, as well as by the Kahn Brothers (architect Albert Kahn and engineer Julius Kahn). It was characterized primarily by its flooring system, which comprised a series of concrete columns supporting a grid of massive concrete girders and smaller intermediary beams, with a slab floor resting above. Though similar in concept and general appearance to older mill construction techniques, it offered superior fire resistance and allowed for larger windows and thinner walls. Beam-and-girder construction remained predominant in the Northeast through the early 1910s. An advertisement for Turner Construction notes that the first flat-slab building in the New York City metropolitan area was the factory they built for the Safety Car Heating and Lighting Co. in Jersey City, New Jersey (contract awarded to Turner in 1912).²⁷

Flat-slab construction was first introduced in the United States in the early 1900s when O. W. Norcross and C. A. P. Turner (unrelated to Turner Construction) filed a series of competing patents.²⁸ It was characterized by a flooring system in which “the load upon the floor is carried directly to the columns without the agency of other elements, such as beams or girders. As commonly constructed, a reinforced-concrete floor slab of uniform thickness...is supported symmetrically upon columns provided with wide conical-shaped capitals.”²⁹ One of the primary benefits of flat-slab construction was the reduction in thickness of the floor plate, which allowed larger windows and more sunlight to enter the building, while also enabling either taller ceilings or additional floors in the same height building.³⁰ The first building in America to employ flat-slab construction techniques was C. A. P. Turner’s 1905 Johnson-Bovey Building in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Though more common in the Midwest and used sporadically elsewhere, its widespread adoption may have been delayed by a patent dispute between Norcross and C. A. P. Turner that wasn’t resolved until 1916, when rights to the design were consolidated in the Flat Slab Patents Co. of Chicago. Even then, it was acknowledged that “the field for the designer of flat slabs is

²⁴ Wermiel, “California Concrete, 1876-1906,” 2-4; Walkowski, “Huyler Building,” Section 8, Pages 3-4; Ernest L. Ransome and Alexis Saurbrey, *Reinforced Concrete Buildings* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1912), 6-11.

²⁵ Amy E. Slaton, *Reinforced Concrete and the Modernization of American Building, 1900-1930* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 15, quoted in Andrew S. Dolkart, *DUMBO Historic District Designation Report*, New York: Landmarks Preservation Commission, 2007, 15.

²⁶ Nathan C. Johnson, *Concrete Engineers Handbook* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1918), 431.

²⁷ “Factories in Structural Concrete,” *Brickbuilder* 23 (1914), xxxiv.

²⁸ Orlando W. Norcross held patents 698,542 and 698,543 (filed 1901 and granted 1902), while Claude A. P. Turner held patents 985,119 and 1,003,384 (filed 1907 and granted 1911).

²⁹ Johnson, 457.

³⁰ Johnson, 457-458.

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not a free one and, unless he can invent a method of reinforcement that is entirely new...he must be licensed under one of the ‘Systems’” owned by the Flat Slab Patents Co.³¹

The Selfridge & Langford Building can therefore be understood as a transition building on two accounts: it was likely the first and only building constructed by the Turner company in Albany during its initial campaign to work outside of New York City, and it was also a building built with the construction techniques originally used by the company and then subsequently retired in favor of a more modern system.³²

Builder: Turner Construction Company

The construction of the Selfridge & Langford Building was carried out by the Turner Construction Company, one of Ransome’s protégés in the popularization of beam and girder construction. The New York City-based Turner company built thousands of reinforced concrete buildings throughout the twentieth century, including many of national and even international significance. The company was founded in 1902 by a pair of engineers—Henry Chandlee Turner, a Maryland-born civil engineer, and DeForrest Dixon—who had spent several years working with Ransome and learning his methods of reinforced concrete construction. Turner Construction purchased Ransome’s patent for his method of reinforced concrete construction and opened its first headquarters at 11 Broadway in the Bowling Green Offices Building (1895-1898, NR 2007) in Manhattan. Among Turner’s first building contracts were the construction of a concrete warehouse at 41-49 Washington Street (1904, NR 2000) for the Robert Gair Company in Brooklyn, which established a lasting relationship between the two companies. Turner also completed a contract for the construction of concrete stairways for the Interborough Rapid Transit Company, which oversaw the construction of the first underground metro system in New York City.³³

The completion of these high-profile contracts spurred a sharp increase in the demand for the services of the Turner Construction Company. Over the course of the following two decades, the company constructed dozens of reinforced concrete buildings throughout New York City—including several other contracts for the Robert Gair Company and many others in the surrounding neighborhood of Brooklyn—and it expanded its operations to major cities throughout the Northeast. By the end of the 1910s, the Turner Construction Company operated branch offices in Philadelphia, Buffalo, and Boston, and counted major companies like Western Electric, Standard Oil, Kodak, and Colgate among its clients.³⁴ The extent of the company’s operations and rapidity of its growth was made explicit in a series of commemorative illustrations depicting the firm’s projects gathered as a single “Turner City,” as the drawings came to be known. The first edition, drawn by artist Richard W. Rummell, covered nine years, 1902-10 inclusive, while the second spanned five years, 1911-15; beginning in 1916, the illustrations were produced annually. The Selfridge & Langdon Building is shown prominently towards the front of the 1911-15 illustration (Figure 8).

³¹ Johnson, 479-480.

³² Carol Willis, “The Vertical Factory: The Concrete Factory,” *The Skyscraper Museum* (Website), https://old.skyscraper.org/EXHIBITIONS/VERTICAL_URBAN_FACTORY/concrete.php; “Advertisement: Turner Construction Company,” *Brickbuilder*, 23, no. 9 (September 1914): xxiv.

³³ Jeffrey L. Covell, “Turner Construction Company,” Tina Grant, ed., *International Directory of Company Histories, Vol. 66* (New York, St. James Press, 2005), 335; Christopher Gray, “Streetscapes/Robert Gair, Dumbo, and Brooklyn; Neighborhood’s Past Incised in its Facades,” *New York Times*, March 14, 2004; Kathy Howe, “DUMBO Historic District,” National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, 2000, Section 8, Pages 4-5.

³⁴ Covell, “Turner Construction Company,” 335; Suzanne Spellman, “Reinforced Concrete and the Turner Construction Company – They Changed the World,” *Spellman of Troy*, March 29, 2022; “One Hundred and Fifty Concrete Industrial Buildings Erected Within Five Years by the Turner Construction Company (Advertisement),” *Construction* 6, no. 4 (April, 1918): 112-113.

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As the successors to Ransome’s reinforced concrete patent, the Turner Construction Company initially embraced beam-and-girder construction methods. Its work for Robert Gair was of this technique, as were its earlier buildings for the Bush Terminal Company, also in Brooklyn. In the 1910s the company began adopting flat-slab techniques. It claimed their factory for the Safety Car Heating and Lighting Co. in Jersey City, New Jersey—for which it received the contract in 1912—was the first such building in the New York City metropolitan area. Around the same time, Turner Construction completed the Baltimore and Ohio warehouse at 239 Eleventh Avenue in Manhattan (1912-13), which was touted as the “largest concrete building on Manhattan Island” and was the first of its kind approved by the Manhattan Department of Buildings.³⁵ In 1919, the company completed the construction of the U.S. Army Military Ocean Terminal (NR 983) in Sunset Park, Brooklyn, which was the largest reinforced concrete building in the country upon its completion.

Although the Great Depression temporarily slowed its growth, the entry of the United States into World War II renewed the growth of the Turner Construction Company. The United States Military commissioned the company’s involvement in the construction of buildings related to the war effort. At the end of the war, Turner stepped down as president of the company, and after the very brief tenure of his brother, Archie Turner, his son, Henry Chandlee Turner Jr., assumed the position. Turner Jr. oversaw the company during the prosperous decades around the middle of the century. The Turner Construction Company completed some of its most iconic contracts during this period, including the construction of the United Nations Secretariat Building (1952, extant), the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts (1959-1969, extant) and Madison Square Garden (1967, extant) in New York, and the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum (1977) in Boston.³⁶

During the second half of twentieth century, the Turner Construction Company continued to grow its operations in the United States, and major changes to its corporate structure took place. By the end of the century, the company maintained branch offices in major cities in every region of the country and engaged in the construction of a wide scope of building typologies, from modern medical facilities to colossal sports complexes. At the end of the 1960s, stock in the company began to be traded publicly, and by the middle of the 1980s, the Turner family no longer directly oversaw the business. In the late 1990s, the German-based company Hochtief AG assumed ownership of the Turner Construction Company, which continues to function as a subsidiary at present.³⁷

In recent decades, the Turner Construction Company has expanded its contracting work internationally. The company was involved in the construction of the Taipei 101 Tower (2004, extant), which was the tallest building in the world from the time of its completion until 2010. The company currently operates throughout countries around the world, and as of 2021, it was the construction company with the highest revenue in the United States. The Turner Construction Company continues to accept contracts throughout New York State and has recently been involved in multiple projects in Albany, including renovations to Albany International Airport (2020), the construction of the Emerging Technology and Entrepreneurship Complex at the University of Albany (2021), and the planned construction of a high school in the Albany Public School System.³⁸

³⁵ “The Baltimore and Ohio Railroad Company’s Freight Terminal in New York,” *American Architect* 107, February 24, 1915, 116-119

³⁶ Covell, “Turner Construction Company,” 336.

³⁷ Covell, “Turner Construction Company,” 336-337.

³⁸ Covell, “Turner Construction Company,” 337-338; Zachary Phillips, “The Country’s Top 10 Commercial Contractors for 2021,” *Construction Dive*, June 10, 2021; “Our Projects,” Turner (website), <https://www.turnerconstruction.com/projects/emerging-technology-and-entrepreneurship-complex-etec>.

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Concrete Buildings in Albany

Despite the popularity of reinforced concrete in industrial cities, there are only seven known early twentieth century buildings built with this method in the city of Albany. They are listed below in order of their date. Only two are outside of the warehouse district (which has been proposed for listing) and only one predates the Selfridge & Langford Building. Ironically, it was also designed by Charles Ogden. None can be verified as the work of Turner Construction.

American Meter Building (1906-07), 991 Broadway. This is a four-story reinforced concrete daylight factory building. This is Albany's earliest concrete building and it was also designed by Charles Ogden, the architect of the Selfridge & Langford Building. It was associated with a local gas meter manufacturer for fifty years. It is unclear if it was a Turner Construction building; however, it was built just at the beginning of Turner's operations. Ogden's design for the building was a significant departure from his earlier work, which was primarily residential with a few commercial buildings in the CBD. His design for the four-story building was fairly simple, yet elegant. Broad pilasters divided all elevations into bays that held large industrial multi-pane sash (replaced). Yet each pilaster featured a circular medallion at the top and extended over the roofline, which is stepped on either side, suggesting capitals. Ogden used a more fully developed version of the pilaster and medallion form on the Selfridge & Langford Building

Selfridge & Langford (1911), 101 Central Avenue. This is a four-story reinforced concrete daylight factory type warehouse designed by Charles Ogden. It is Albany's second concrete building, as well as Ogden's second and final design in concrete.

Consolidated Car Company (1913-14), 413 N. Pearl Street. This is a four-part factory constructed over a long period of time using different methods of construction. One of the four parts is a reinforced concrete daylight factory built to the design of Albany architect Walter Van Guysling. It is a very typical daylight factory design without ornamentation.

Industrial Building (1915), 1031 Broadway. This reinforced concrete daylight was designed by prominent Albany architect Marcus T. Reynolds

Albany Hardware and Iron (1926), 139 Broadway. This seven-story reinforced concrete daylight factory is elaborately embellished with Tudor Revival style decoration. The architect is unknown. It is outside the warehouse district only because it is located far to the south; however, it is also located in an industrial area.

Hauf Building (1926), 175 Central Avenue. This a few blocks west of Selfridge & Langford and in the commercial rather than the warehouse district. It is constructed of reinforced concrete with a brick-faced façade. Like Selfridge & Langford, it has a more decorative and less strictly utilitarian façade.

Central Warehouse (1927), 143 Montgomery Street. This is a large blocky reinforced concrete food storage warehouse with few windows.

Architect: Charles G. Ogden (1857-1931)

Charles G. Ogden was an architect responsible for the design of numerous buildings in the City of Albany. Ogden was born in Albany in 1859 and attended high school at the Albany Boys' Academy. Edward Ogden, Charles's father, had an established architectural practice and prominent social standing in Albany by the time Charles was born. A British immigrant, Edward Ogden joined early partnerships with fellow Englishmen William L. Woollett Jr., then Frank P. Wright, and, lastly, with his son, who joined as an apprentice at the age

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of eighteen, becoming a full partner in 1891. Together, the practices of the elder Ogden and his son spanned seventy years and were filled with commissions for stately private homes, schools, churches, and public buildings. The Ogdens partnered from 1891 until Edward's death in 1900. Many of the buildings they designed together have burned or been demolished. Still extant is a Queen Anne-style home with prominent tower at 155 Lake Avenue, built in Albany circa 1898; another Queen Anne-style home with a generous columned porch at 620 Madison Avenue, and, on the same street, a brick masonry church with hints of the Romanesque Revival Style, built circa 1897.

Charles Ogden fared well working independently after his father's death, creating yet another resume of designs for private homes and institutional buildings. Three of his commercial buildings survive. Ogden designed the 1903 Albany Home Telephone Co, at Howard and Lodge streets, in downtown Albany, in the Renaissance Revival style (NR listed). The building, of pressed, tawny brick, is highly ornamented, with an arcade of expansive Palladian windows and stonework carved in festoons and wreaths. The 1901 American Cigar Company factory, at Arch and Grand streets, and the 1913 Fuld and Hatch Knitting Company building, at Liberty and Hamilton streets, show a recognition of the trend toward simple, minimally ornamented industrial buildings. The style of the cigar factory is so plain as to make the facade nearly indistinguishable from the other elevations. Ornamentation on the red brick building is confined to a bit of corbeling at the roofline and a pronounced but plain copper cornice. The Fuld and Hatch building more closely reflects architectural methods and goals of the time. The building is likely of steel frame or concrete construction, expressed on the brick masonry exterior as pilasters that run from the first to the fourth and final story. Generously sized rectangular window openings, meant to maximize lighting, are situated between pilasters.

The reinforced concrete American Meter Company factory (1906) was a departure from Ogden's overall body of work and, in particular, from his use of brick in the construction of commercial buildings. In fact, Ogden's 1906 drawings show the building originally conceived with brick walls. Specifications call for "brick walls and reinforced concrete throughout" and it is not known why there was a change in construction methods. The characteristics of the American Meter building in all other respects, including its size and orientation, the number of bays and the generous size of window openings, follow Ogden's 1906 design. Ogden's surviving first- and fourth-floor plans show a logical division of uses, with the east (rear) elevation devoted to shipping accommodated by a spur of the Delaware & Hudson Railroad that ran directly behind the building. The balance of the first floor was devoted to storage, while the entire fourth floor was reserved for the testing, adjusting and assembly of meters.

Ogden gained a reputation for his ability to adapt modern building techniques for the construction of traditional building typologies. An advertisement in the *Knickerbocker Press* from 1912 drew attention to Ogden's proficiency in this regard: "Having thorough practical and theoretical knowledge which comes only as the result of long intimacy with the architectural profession, and a close study of every phase of modern building, Mr. Ogden built up a large and steadily increasing business by combining with the lines of architectural beauty all the utilitarian comforts which are called for by the modern life of today."

This attention to the interplay between tradition and technological development shaped the design of the Selfridge & Langford Building, which mingled the modern use of reinforced concrete construction with the Neoclassical façade of a more traditional commercial building, giving the viewer the impression of its durability and inviting patrons to a place of business. Ending his solo practice in 1916, Ogden formed a practice with J. J. Gander, in partnership with whom he designed the renovations to the Selfridge & Langford Building carried out in 1918. The most significant project undertaken by Ogden and Gander during their partnership was the renovation of Albany City Hall (1883, NR 1972) in 1916, which included the addition of fireproof material and

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the alteration of the roof.³⁹ Ogden & Gander continued their partnership until 1926, when Ogden entered retirement and moved to Rye, New York, with his wife, Eliza. Ogden died in July of 1931.

After the Period of Significance

During the second half of the twentieth century, commercial activity slowed along Central Avenue due to competition with suburban shopping centers accessible by an increasing number of highways. This pressure forced the closure of many commercial operations along Central Avenue, and while many of the buildings formerly occupied by businesses remained vacant, others were converted to office space in the later decades of the twentieth century.⁴⁰

As with many of these buildings, the Selfridge & Langford Building was converted to office space in the 1980s. After Standard Furniture ceased operating in the building, the State of New York purchased the Selfridge & Langford Building and converted the whole building to offices in 1982. This renovation included the installation of drywall partitions and dropped ceilings, as well as carpeted floors and fluorescent light fixtures. The State of New York used the building as an office for the Division of Parole, an agency in the Department of Corrections and Community Supervisions. The agency remained in the building through the 2010s and only recently ceased operating in the building, which remains vacant at present.⁴¹

Conclusion

The Selfridge & Langford Building is significant for its association with the evolution of reinforced concrete architecture and its use in Albany. The building is one of the earliest iterations of the kind of reinforced concrete skeleton construction system built in Albany and the first concrete building used for retail commerce in the city. Architect Charles G. Ogden balanced the impression of durability and resistance to fire with the imperative to appeal to a wide customer base in his design for the Selfridge & Langford Building, which has a modest Neoclassical façade and large structural concrete bays. The exterior of the building retains substantial integrity to its original Neoclassical design, and much of the original structural features remain legible on the interior. In all, the building retains enough integrity to illustrate its historic functions and significance and it continues to serve as a significant contribution to the streetscape of Central Avenue and to the record of the architectural development of Albany.

³⁹ Carl Johnson, "Albany Architects: The Ogdens," *Hoxie* (Website), Feb. 16, 2015; "C. G. Ogden Dies, Noted Albany Architect," *Albany Times-Union*, July 26, 1931.

⁴⁰ Kennedy, *O Albany*, 151-154.

⁴¹ Sweet and Nicholson, "97-99 Central Avenue," Building Structure Inventory Form; Alcue, "Selfridge & Langford," *Doc Circe Died for Our Sins* (Website), Nov. 5, 2019.

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DRAFT The Selfridge & Langford Building

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Name of Property

Albany, NY
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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

Primary location of additional data:

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67 has been requested)
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other
- Name of repository: _____

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property .48 acres

(Do not include previously listed resource acreage.)

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	<u>18</u>	<u>601119</u>	<u>4723771</u>	3	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
2	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	4	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The boundary is indicated by a heavy line on the enclosed map with scale.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundary has been drawn to encompass the historic tax lot originally occupied by the Selfridge & Langford Building. It excludes the northwest portion of the current tax lot, currently occupied by a parking lot, that was merged into this property in 1983 (outside the period of significance).

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Name of Property

Albany, NY
County and State

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Joey Duggan, Associate Historian; edited by Karen Kennedy, Director of Architectural History

Revised and edited by Christopher D. Brazee and Kathleen LaFrank, NYSHPO

organization Preservation Studios date August 2023

street & number 170 Florida Street telephone 716 725-6410

city or town Buffalo state NY zip code 14208

e-mail jduggan@preservationstudios.com

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.

- **Continuation Sheets**
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)



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Albany, NY

Name of Property

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Figures:

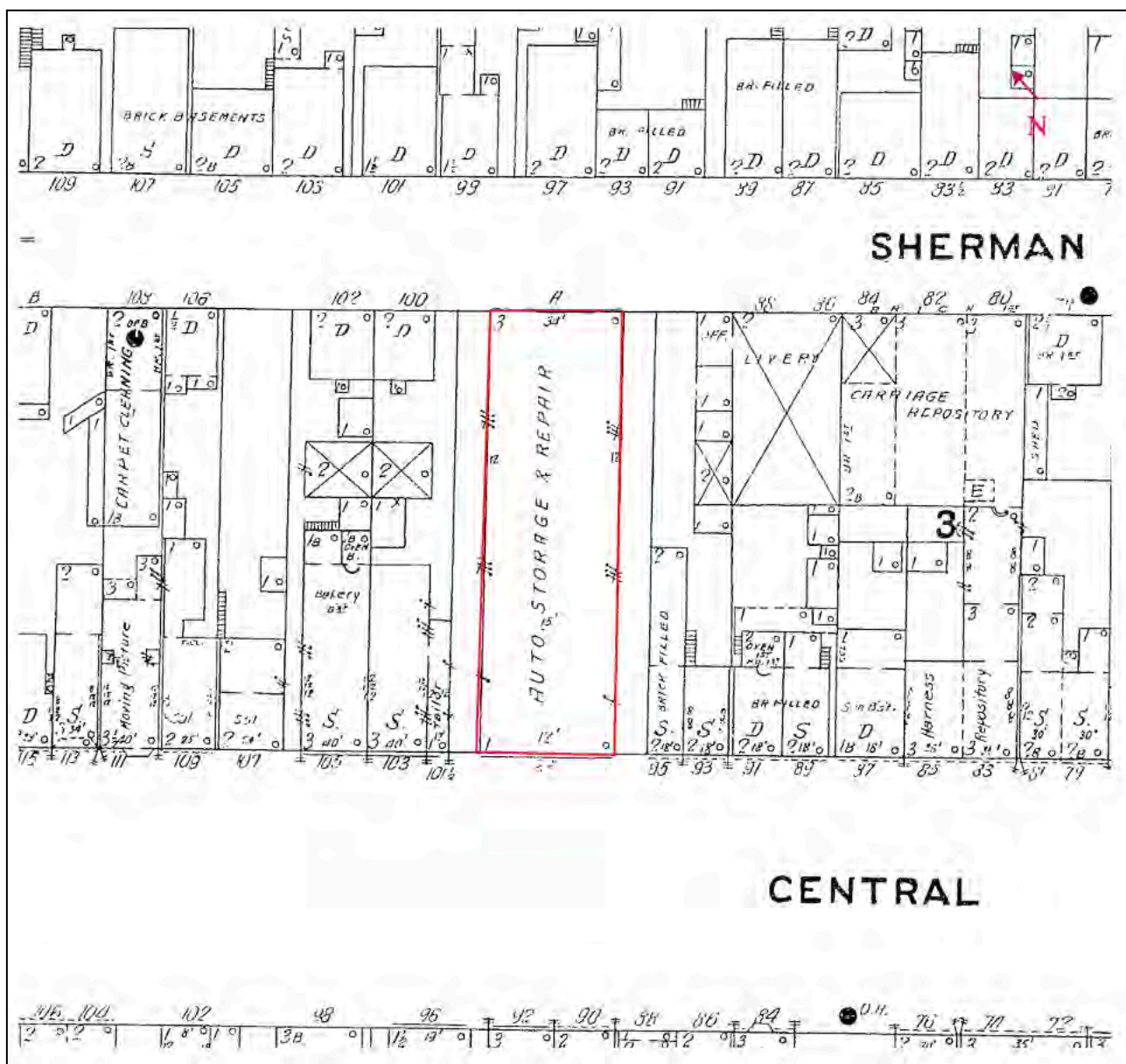


Figure 1

Map of the area of the Selfridge & Langford Building in 1908, before its construction. It appears that the malt house demolished to accommodate its construction was in use as a garage for automobiles at the time (Sanborn Map Co., "Albany, New York," 1908, Sheet 46).

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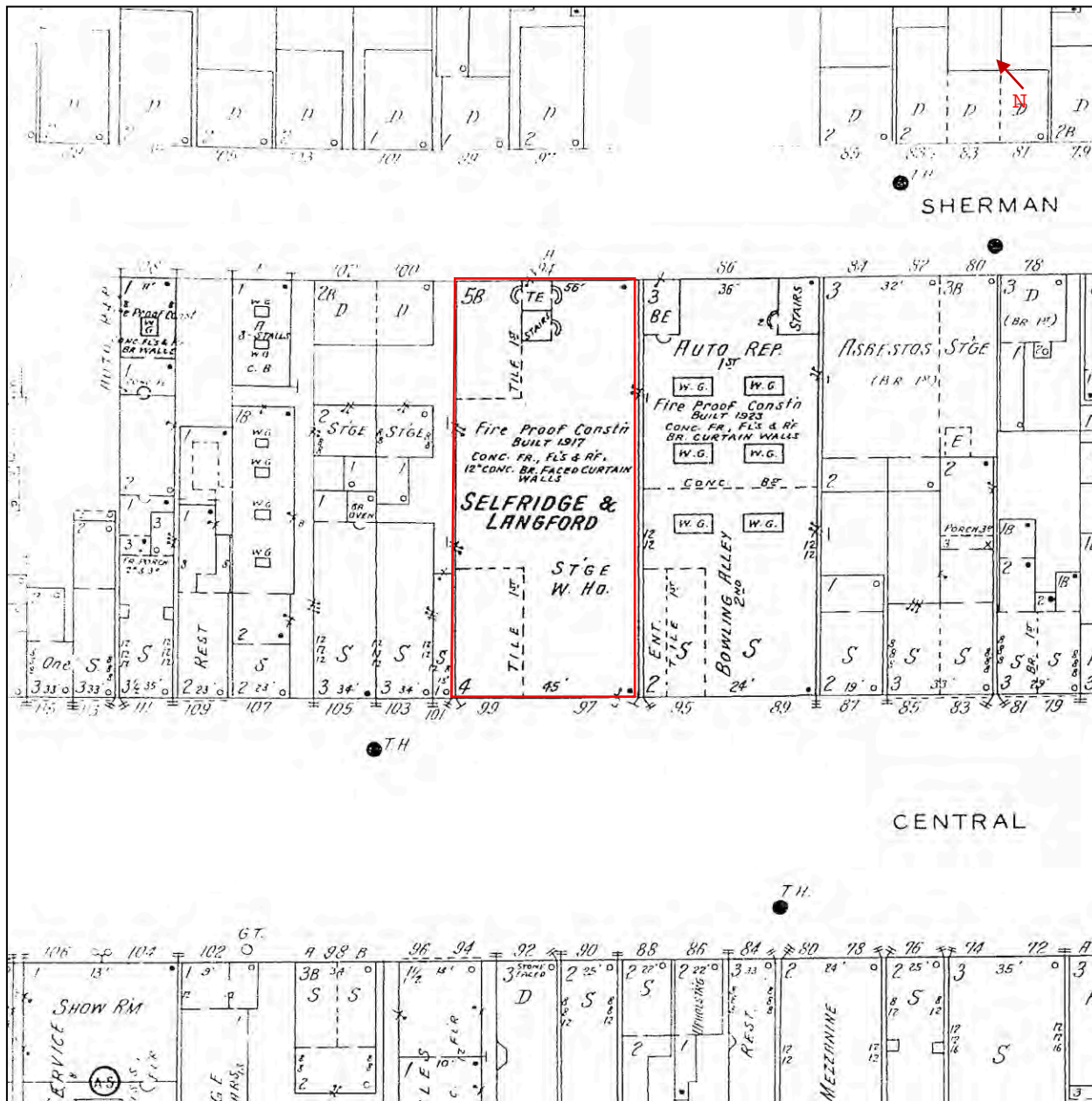


Figure 2

Map of the Selfridge & Langford Building in 1934, indicated. The map incorrectly indicates that the building was constructed in 1917 (Sanborn Map Co., "Albany, New York," 1934, Sheet 69).

DRAFT The Selfridge & Langford Building

Albany, NY

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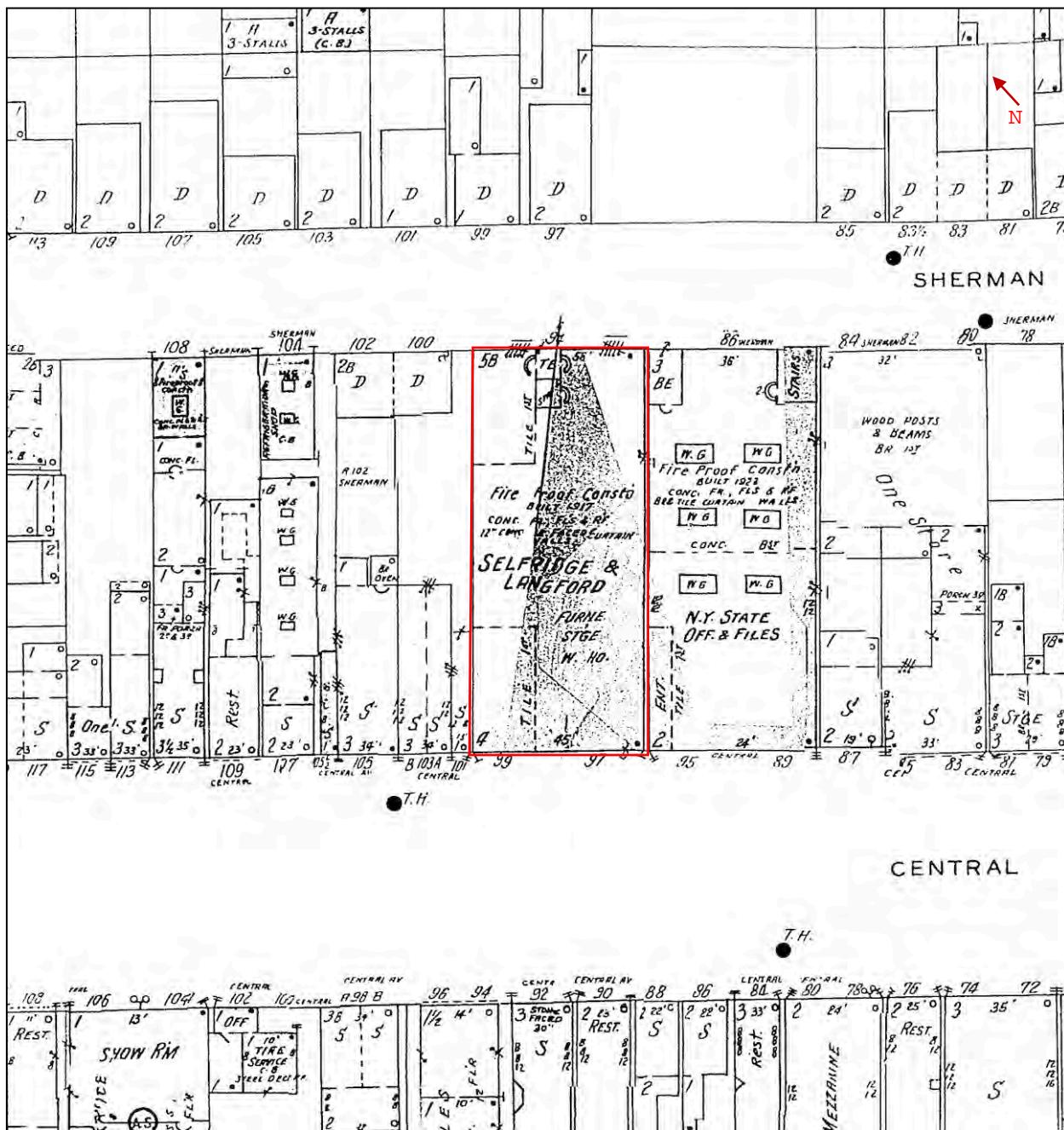


Figure 3

Map of the Selfridge & Langford Building in 1951 (Sanborn Map Co., "Albany, New York," 1934, corrected for 1951, Sheet 69).

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Figure 4

A photograph of the Selfridge & Langford Building during its construction (W. H. Nye, "An Up-to-Date Retail Store," *Cement*, 12, no. 4 (August, 1911): 93).

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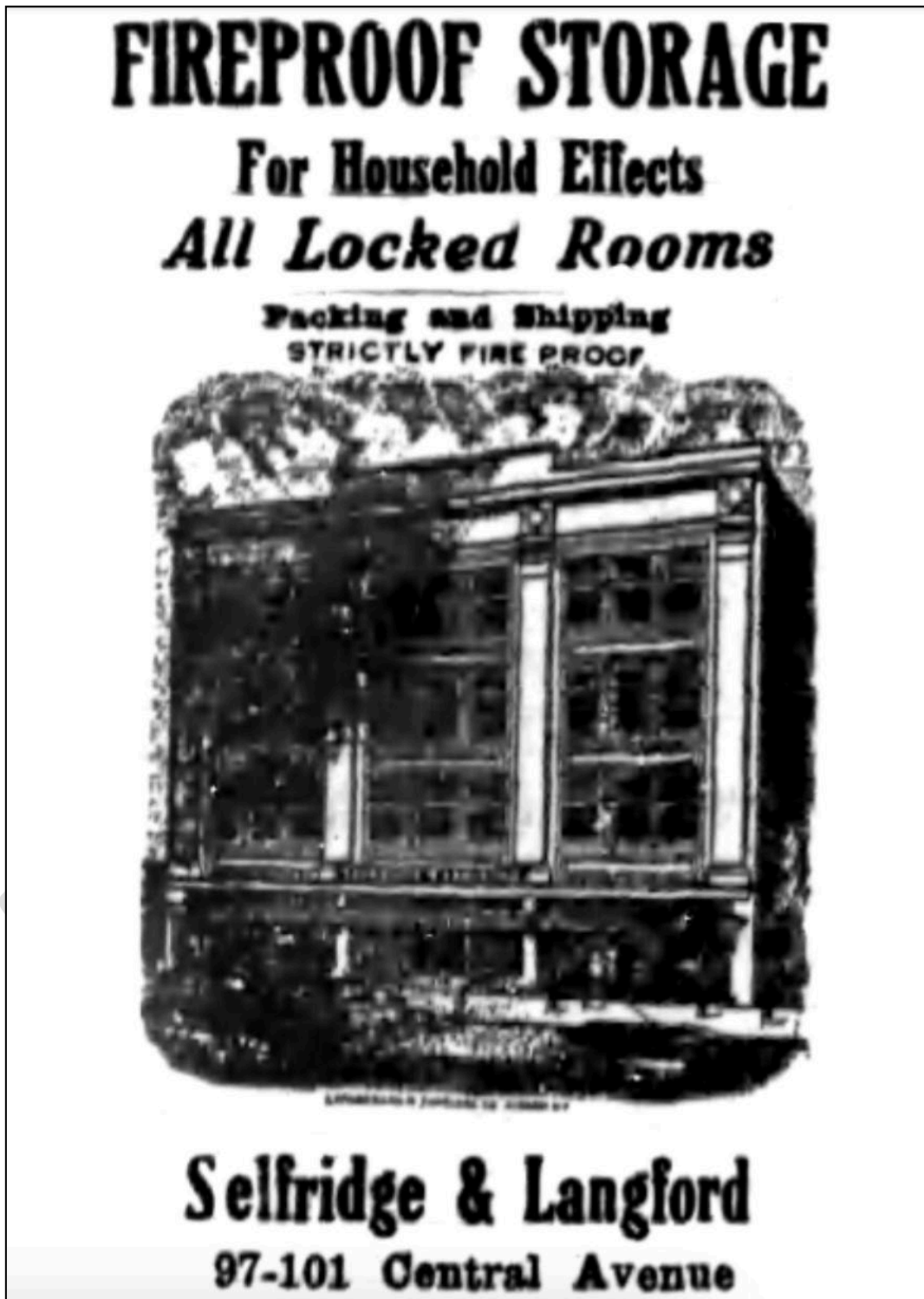


Figure 5

An early advertising rendering of the Selfridge & Langford Building, publicizing the services provided.

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Figure 6

A photograph of the Selfridge & Langford Building in 1923.

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Figure 7

A photograph of the Selfridge & Langford Building in 1958, the year that it was purchased by Standard Furniture ("Standard Furniture Buys on Central Ave." *Albany Times-Union*, May 4, 1958).

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ONE HUNDRED AND FIFTY CONCRETE INDUSTRIAL BUILDINGS ERECTED WITHIN FIVE YEARS BY THE TURNER CONSTRUCTION COMPANY

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1—Standard Oil Co. Drive Wks. 2—American Agri'l Chem. Co. 3—Standard Oil Co. Pipe Wks. 4—Standard Varnish Wks. 5—Cotton Supply Div'nd 6—Finger & Conroy Hoist'g 7—Standard Oil Co. 8—Albany & Co. 9—National Transportation Co. 10—Balkin Paper Co. 11—Trotter & Bailey Mfg. Co. 12—Standard Condensed Milk Co. 13—Standard Oil Co. 14—Standard Oil Co. 15—Standard Oil Co. 16—Standard Oil Co. 17—Standard Oil Co. 18—Standard Oil Co. 19—Standard Oil Co. 20—Standard Oil Co. 21—Standard Oil Co. 22—Standard Oil Co. 23—Standard Oil Co. 24—Standard Oil Co. 25—Standard Oil Co. 26—Standard Oil Co. 27—Standard Oil Co. 28—Standard Oil Co. 29—Standard Oil Co. 30—Standard Oil Co. 31—Standard Oil Co. 32—Standard Oil Co. 33—Standard Oil Co. 34—Standard Oil Co. 35—Standard Oil Co. 36—Standard Oil Co. 37—Standard Oil Co. 38—Standard Oil Co. 39—Standard Oil Co. 40—Standard Oil Co. 41—Standard Oil Co. 42—Standard Oil Co. 43—Standard Oil Co. 44—Standard Oil Co. 45—Standard Oil Co. 46—Standard Oil Co. 47—Standard Oil Co. 48—Standard Oil Co. 49—Standard Oil Co. 50—Standard Oil Co. 51—Standard Oil Co. 52—Standard Oil Co. 53—Standard Oil Co. 54—Standard Oil Co. 55—Standard Oil Co. 56—Standard Oil Co. 57—Standard Oil Co. 58—Standard Oil Co. 59—Standard Oil Co. 60—Standard Oil Co. 61—Standard Oil Co. 62—Standard Oil Co. 63—Standard Oil Co. 64—Standard Oil Co. 65—Standard Oil Co. 66—Standard Oil Co. 67—Standard Oil Co. 68—Standard Oil Co. 69—Standard Oil Co. 70—Standard Oil Co. 71—Standard Oil Co. 72—Standard Oil Co. 73—Standard Oil Co. 74—Standard Oil Co. 75—Standard Oil Co. 76—Standard Oil Co. 77—Standard Oil Co. 78—Standard Oil Co. 79—Standard Oil Co. 80—Standard Oil Co. 81—Standard Oil Co. 82—Standard Oil Co. 83—Standard Oil Co. 84—Standard Oil Co. 85—Standard Oil Co. 86—Standard Oil Co. 87—Standard Oil Co. 88—Standard Oil Co. 89—Standard Oil Co. 90—Standard Oil Co. 91—Standard Oil Co. 92—Standard Oil Co. 93—Standard Oil Co. 94—Standard Oil Co. 95—Standard Oil Co. 96—Standard Oil Co. 97—Standard Oil Co. 98—Standard Oil Co. 99—Standard Oil Co. 100—Standard Oil Co. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 101—Standard Oil Co. 102—Standard Oil Co. 103—Standard Oil Co. 104—Standard Oil Co. 105—Standard Oil Co. 106—Standard Oil Co. 107—Standard Oil Co. 108—Standard Oil Co. 109—Standard Oil Co. 110—Standard Oil Co. 111—Standard Oil Co. 112—Standard Oil Co. 113—Standard Oil Co. 114—Standard Oil Co. 115—Standard Oil Co. 116—Standard Oil Co. 117—Standard Oil Co. 118—Standard Oil Co. 119—Standard Oil Co. 120—Standard Oil Co. 121—Standard Oil Co. 122—Standard Oil Co. 123—Standard Oil Co. 124—Standard Oil Co. 125—Standard Oil Co. 126—Standard Oil Co. 127—Standard Oil Co. 128—Standard Oil Co. 129—Standard Oil Co. 130—Standard Oil Co. 131—Standard Oil Co. 132—Standard Oil Co. 133—Standard Oil Co. 134—Standard Oil Co. 135—Standard Oil Co. 136—Standard Oil Co. 137—Standard Oil Co. 138—Standard Oil Co. 139—Standard Oil Co. 140—Standard Oil Co. 141—Standard Oil Co. 142—Standard Oil Co. 143—Standard Oil Co. 144—Standard Oil Co. 145—Standard Oil Co. 146—Standard Oil Co. 147—Standard Oil Co. 148—Standard Oil Co. 149—Standard Oil Co. 150—Standard Oil Co.
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Figure 8
 A graphic from an advertisement for the Turner Construction Company (“One Hundred and Fifty Concrete Industrial Buildings Erected Within Five Years by the Turner Construction Company (Advertisement),” Construction 6, no. 4 (April, 1918): 112-113). The Selfridge & Langford Building is listed at number 124, located on the left page a third of the way from the bottom and two in from the page fold.

DRAFT The Selfridge & Langford Building

Albany, NY

Name of Property

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Photographs:

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map.

Name of Property: The Selfridge & Langford Building

City or Vicinity: Albany

County: Albany County

State: NY

Photographer: Mike Puma

Date Photographed: May 10, 2023

Location of Original Digital Files: 170 Florida Street, Buffalo, New York, 14208

Description of Photographs:

Photo #1 (NY_AlbanyCounty_TheSelfridge&LangfordBuilding_0001)
Building facade, camera facing east

Photo #2 (NY_AlbanyCounty_TheSelfridge&LangfordBuilding_0002)
Building facades, camera facing northeast

Photo #3 (NY_AlbanyCounty_TheSelfridge&LangfordBuilding_0003)
North and rear elevations, camera facing southwest

Photo #4 (NY_AlbanyCounty_TheSelfridge&LangfordBuilding_0004)
Rear elevation, camera facing northwest

Photo #5 (NY_AlbanyCounty_TheSelfridge&LangfordBuilding_0005)
Subbasement, camera facing southeast

Photo #6 (NY_AlbanyCounty_TheSelfridge&LangfordBuilding_0006)
Basement, camera facing southeast

Photo #7 (NY_AlbanyCounty_TheSelfridge&LangfordBuilding_0007)
Stairwell, camera facing west

Photo #8 (NY_AlbanyCounty_TheSelfridge&LangfordBuilding_0008)
First floor, camera facing east

Photo #9 (NY_AlbanyCounty_TheSelfridge&LangfordBuilding_0009)
Second floor, camera facing southeast

Photo #10 (NY_AlbanyCounty_TheSelfridge&LangfordBuilding_0010)
Third floor, camera facing northwest

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.



NY_Albany County_The Selfridge & Langford Building_0001



NY_Albany County_The Selfridge & Langford Building_0002



NY_Alban County_The Selfridge & Langford Building_0003



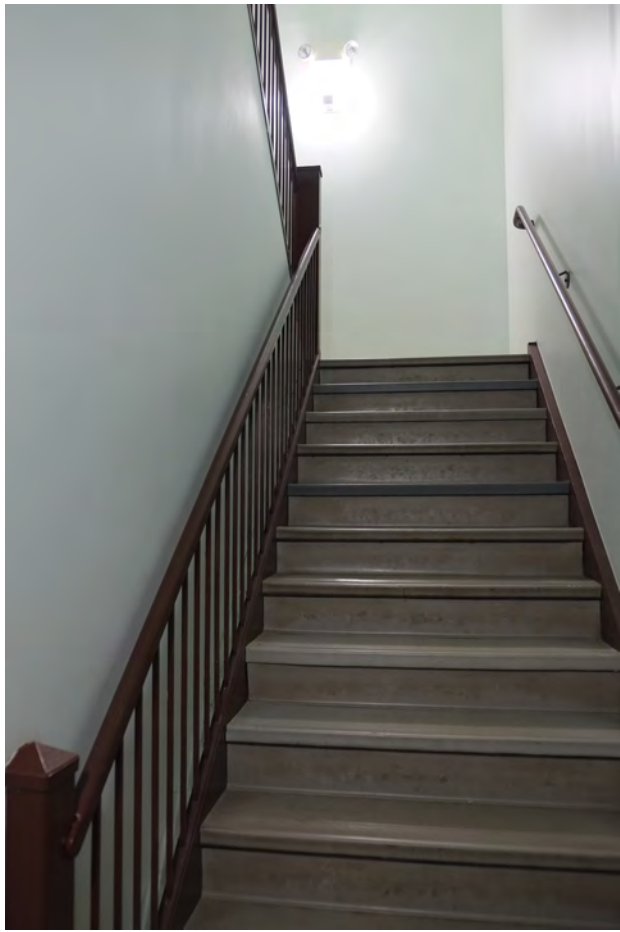
NY_Alban County_The Selfridge & Langford Building_0004



NY_Albany County_The Selfridge & Langford Building_0005



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